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End to Red Tape Is Urged To Speed U. S. Warplanes

This is the final article in a series based on a six-week survey by a team of New York Herald Tribune reporters documenting a serious situation in military aircraft production.

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Can anything be done to end the delays that today hamstring this country's production of modern warplanes; delays that imperil the national security?

The aircraft industry says yes—a great deal.

Responsibly placed Pentagon and Air Force officers agree with industry.

But the remedy, industry warns, wil not come through the creation of more study committees in Washington or by accumulating more voluminous Pentagon reports and piously worded directives on the subject.

Plane-makers insist that a fresh approach is essential. And that the point of attack must be on Pentagon and Air Force indecision, red tape and needless paper work. They say the axe must be used.

A number of high-ranking officers have agreed with the industry men in off-the-record conversations with these New York Herald Tribune reporters.

The three by-products of bureaucracy — indecision, red tape and excessive paper work —are by far the biggest causes of delays in the military air-

Finletter

Quarles

craft program, according to the industry executives in the three major branches of airframes, electronics systems and jet engines.

They gave their views to the Herald Tribune in interviews at plants from the East to the West Coasts during a six-week survey into delays in the design, development and production of critically needed warplanes.

Their chief recommendations, embodying virtually unanimous agreement in the industry, are:

1. Centralize decision-making authority within the Pentagon and Air Force to insure action in place of delays. This means slashing through the multiplicity of committees and study groups that hold much responsibility, but little decision authority. They can hold up decisions through dissent, or approve programs, but they can't give final go-aheads.

2. Assign to each aircraft project— or to the company working on it—an officer with delegated power to make on-the-spot decisions on all but basic policy and budget questions. This would end much of the present buck-passing and delays in the lower echelon supervision of manufacturing processes. But it would leave major design and cost decisions to the proposed streamlined decision center in Washington.

3. Have the Air Force largely limit itself to the "what" of its aircraft design objectives and allow the manufacturers much more freedom to devise the "how" of making the planes to

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End to Red Tape on Planes Urged

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the Air Force's performance objectives.

The Industry's View

As it is, the industry says, the Air Force not only establishes what it wants in a plane but endlessly interferes, with time-wasting red tape, in telling the manufacturer how to make it. The performance requirements for today's planes already push beyond present technological know how, industry says, and it must have freedom to work out the how of manufacture without petty intrusion from official groups which often are unequal to the job.

4. Have top Pentagon and Air Force authority protect its own improved procedures from infiltration by the "creeping bureaucracy" of their lower echelons. Specifically, industry men say that recent new warplane procurement policies designed to speed up production, though put into effect with good results, are threatened with impairment by the subtle efforts of lower echelon agencies to claim supervisory jurisdiction, thus adding red tape.

5. Have the Pentagon and Air Force institute within the industry a continuous research and development effort to assure for aircraft programs constant scientific advances into new realms of technology. In the past such research and development has see-sawed. Interludes of near-indifference were followed by "holler-and-yell" peaks of urgency, which in turn tapered off again.

Program Hinged to Funds Provided by Congress

Research and development is, o course, hinged to funds that Congress provides. Pentagon officials often say that Congress is more interested in "hardware" than in test tubes; or in a more distant, Buck Rogers research program than vital short-range developmental projects. Plane-makers say that the country's survival is linked with technological advances in both ranges, and that Congress will buy survival if the situation is presented rightly.

6. Allow industry to help supplement the nation's intelligence effort by showing agencies what and where to seek in the field of technological information about the potential enemy. And then let industry help the intelligence agencies evaluate this. Industry leaders say intelligence agencies are overlooking source material that could vitally help industry and the military obtain a picture of the enemy's advanced technology programs and direction of effort. This was suggested by the last Hoover Commission some six years ago, but industry says the intelligence effort is still inadequate. A major technological break-through could tip the balance of power.

The industry has other suggestions for shaving lead time, but these are the main ones for first action toward yielding most effective results.

Blame for Major Faults Laid to Rapid Expansion

Blame for the three major faults of indecision, red tape and unnecessary paper work was generally ascribed by industry exectives to the rapidity with which the Air Force has expanded during its comparatively brief existence as a separate service. And to the inherent bureaucracy of the military system.

But many manufacturers pointed out that the same bureaucratic evils are always intruding into their own industries as these grow larger. Yet industry has learned to cope with them. This has been done, they emphasized, by the same method they urge before the Pentagon and Air Force; that is, by centralizing authority at the top and then delegating it to the right places below.

Most industry people interviewed agreed that the inertia of the "system" is such that action from the top is required to accomplish the needed reforms.

The industry is not alone in criticizing the Pentagon. But the many responsible officers within the official agencies who privately sympathize with the manufacturers are not, for obvious reasons, able to say so publicly.

The Herald Tribune asked Secretary of the Air Force Donald Quarles about the industry complaints. Discussing the point made by manufacturers on insufficient delegation of authority to override red tape, he said that this was "maybe valid."

Air Force Lacks Unlimited Power

But, Mr. Quarles added, the Air Force does not have unbounded power to delegate authority since it has to be guided by the Defense Department and Congress "in the framework of the international scene."

Mr. Quarles also said that the Air Force does not have in its ranks as many czars as the aircraft industry seems to want in decision-making positions.

(One manufacturer pointed out to the Herald Tribune in reply that the Air Force has installed as head of its intercontinental ballistics missile program Maj. Gen. Ben Schriever, who has wide decision-making power of the very kind urged by the industry. The same thing could be done, the manufacturer said, with the multi-million-dollar aircraft projects, which are not especially numerous.)

Mr. Quarles seemed less concerned about the lead time in making airplanes than in the quality of such planes when they are organized in combat units.

"The real criteria is if we get it (an airplane) out in proper phase to modernize our operational forces and if it is modern enough to stay so until it is replaced," he asserted.

Thomas K. Finletter, secretary of the Air Force from 1950 to 1953, told the Herald Tribune that aircraft lead time is no new problem—"it was an issue I was constantly at work on."

Mr. Finletter said that the Air Force kept "a close check on all aircraft programs" to carry out its responsibility to Congress, but expressed the belief that the lead time "situation could be improved." However, like Mr. Quarles, he indicated doubt that if "giving a blank check" to aircraft manufacturers would solve all lead-time problems.

Defense Leaders Call It Serious Issue

A Defense Department official assured the Herald Tribune that the problem is regarded in the Pentagon and Air Force as a very serious issue.

This official cited as one effort made by the department to reduce aircraft lead time a study undertaken in September, 1953, by a group headed by Under Secretary of Defense Reuben B. Robertson jr.

The Robertson committee studied the problem for a year, he said, interviewing more than 600 officials of the Department of Defense and executives of thirty aircraft manufacturing and research organizations. In August of this year it reported its findings to Secretary of Defense Wilson.

Report's Adequacy Doubted by Industry

Industry executives, interviewed by the Robertson committee, who have since received the recommendations made by the committee, told these reporters they greatly doubted its adequacy.

Some executives said the suggestions amounted to little more than proposals for tightening up here and there. Others dismissed it as just more committee paper work.

In any case, the report itself has been put under official security wraps, That puzzles the industry executives. Some had hoped that it would get a great deal of publicity, and they are asking, is it because of too much embarrassing detail on indecision, red tape and paper work?

Action is what they want.

The Soviets are closing the gap fast. They may have already closed it. Industry feels that only firm and forthright action from the top can save this country from the peril that is overtaking it.